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ABSTRACT

Schools must strive to maintain a balanced curriculum in which students acquire basic skills in communication, computation, citizenship, healthful living, the sciences, the arts, and vocational endeavors. Both teaching and school administration can be greatly improved with new electronic technology. Financial reform will also be necessary, as funding will be restricted. Federal, state, and local funding efforts must be more coordinated. Allocation formulas must be adaptable by the local school. The integration of career and vocational training into the curriculum is desirable. More funding for the establishment of programs to help immigrants to adjust to the language and culture of our country is needed. (SAS)

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SELECTED NEEDS OF ELEMENTARY/SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE 1980's[1]

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Society is becoming increasingly demanding of its public institutions. These demands are especially acute in the public school arena. The public envisions the development and education of all youth who can successfully function and compete in a rapidly changing national and world community. The preparation of all youth regardless of background will be a major challenge which must be addressed by the public schools in the 80's. Although all operational aspects of a public school system must effectively work together to accomplish its purposes, this paper focuses on several select and vital areas that must be given attention if the challenges of the decade ahead are to be successfully met.

The literal explosion in the field of electronic technology in the last decade has produced an astounding number of advancements that affect people, directly or indirectly, in every aspect of their lives. Computer print-outs, reader-printers, micro-processors, computers, and satellites have become commonplace terms in our vocabulary. Reduction in costs has placed electronic hardware on the shelves of the marketplace at a cost within reach of many of our institutions and many of our citizens. Although the machines are now readily available, the effect and application of electronic technology in our lives is continuing to emerge and in its infant stages of development. The effect this resource will have upon public education, in all probability, has not yet been explored as thoroughly as

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it should be.

Several questions arise concerning the relationship of electronic technology and public education. What is the potential for using electronic technology in the public education sector? Can public education be improved by incorporating new applications coming out of the field of electronics? Can costs be curtailed by using electronic technology without reducing instructional effectiveness? What structural changes, if any, must be made in the public education delivery system if electronic technology is assimilated into the education structure? These are but a few of the questions that must be responded to and analyzed if decisions are made to extensively incorporate this new resource in the public schools.

A cursory view of the potential for electronic technology in public education triggers a number of intriguing possibilities. Realizing the tremendous capability of computers to handle information quickly and accurately, the possibilities for individualizing learning and instruction seem within our grasp. Instant feedback on the learning progress of students would enable teachers to determine what has or has not been learned, to diagnose learning deficiencies, and to prescribe individual learning programs to remove those deficiencies. The computer's information-handling capabilities could provide print-outs to parents on a timely basis describing students' learning progress and, in addition, could provide suggestions regarding the kinds of help that might be provided in the home by parents. The advances in electronic technology would enable schools to monitor on a continuing basis the learning progress of each student, thereby enhancing maximum development of the learning potential of every student.

Another possible application of electronic technology to public schools is the expansion of instructional materials required in the teaching/learning processes. Although still in its developmental and shakedown phase, the use

of satellites, telecommunications, and computer reader-printers could provide schools with access to the books, films and other visual materials housed in our great libraries and archives. These resources could be drawn upon whenever a particular lesson required their use. This application could put the informational resource materials of the nation at the finger tip of every teacher and student in any public school.

Electronic technology could help educators at all levels of public education to deal more effectively with the data needed in day-to-day operations of schools. Areas of potential application and further development are the completion and updating of myriad reports; the keeping of records upon which funds are allotted; maintaining and controlling inventories; maintaining payrolls, personnel and student files; effectively using achievement data; scheduling classes and buses; monitoring and controlling energy consumption in schools; and conducting meetings via telecommunications hook-ups with education associates and organizations on a local, state and national scale. This is not an exhaustive list by any means, but one which identifies some of the areas that need to be investigated and developed for use in the public schools in the 80's.

Maintaining viable and effective public schools in the next decade will require adequate support and financing of educational programs essential to meeting the learning needs of all students. At a time when there is an increasing demand for adequate and appropriate educational services that assure that every child who enters the schoolhouse door will function as a productive citizen when he/she leaves school, there is also the accompanying and unprecedented challenge to support and finance those programs necessary to meet those public expectations. The range of student needs has expanded because schools are serving more students with more varied backgrounds than

ever before which necessitates the availability of many specialized public school programs. Numerous federal and state mandates require schools to serve all children regardless of the human conditions they bring with them. This is as it should be; however, if this expectancy is to be fulfilled there must be adequate support at the national, state and local levels of government to implement programs that address the requirements of all students.

Although there are many aspects of public school finance that must be rethought, the following possibilities will need our attention over the next decade. Work related to financial equity has begun in many states which assures an appropriate educational program regardless of where a student lives or his/her educational program needs. Resources and leadership have been provided by the Congress and the Office of Education to conduct finance studies at the state level. Excellent reports and recommendations have resulted which point the direction for educational finance reform. Work must continue in this area toward implementing the study recommendations making public school finance reform a reality.

Adequate public education finance will require improved coordination and use of local, state and federal funds which can be targeted in a manner that is responsive to the educational needs of students. Since student needs are not the same nationally, statewide or within school systems, consideration might be directed toward an educational revenue sharing program in which funds are allocated and used to meet documented educational needs unique to the geographical area being served.

Public education finance systems must incorporate some type of cost differential in that some programs will cost more than others because of the particular clientele which the programs are designed to serve. Examples are exceptional children's programs, programs for the disadvantaged, bilingual

studies, and technical and vocational programs. If these programs are to provide the specialized services needed by these students, funding can no longer be established by using a single formula to serve all program areas. The true cost of each program must be determined.

Additional effort must be directed toward streamlining the allocation of categorical funds. Research in this area must be directed toward ways in which student needs can be documented and addressed on a regional and state basis, and fulfill the intent and purposes for which funds have been appropriated by legislative bodies.

In designing and implementing any public education finance reform, due consideration must be given to the influence reform will have upon public school governance. Appropriating public funds to promote the common good and address documented educational needs is necessary, yet the preservation of state and local governance of public education is a principle that must be continued in public education. Without the responsibility for public education vested in states and local communities, citizens' support for their schools would substantially diminish. The challenge in school finance reform is to assure financial equity for all students and, at the same time, maintain state and local decision-making and responsibility for public education.

New initiatives must be developed and implemented in the area of career and vocational education. New career opportunities and jobs are rapidly expanding and providing greater career options from which our youth must make choices. To assist students in this part of their educational development, it is essential that more emphasis be placed on developing and implementing effective vocational counseling programs that guide students in making appropriate career choices and assist them in actual job placement. With the advent of new types of jobs in the labor market, it is important that the vocational skill training offered in the public schools is up-to-date in

providing youth with the skills needed to successfully function on the job. In accomplishing this, more efforts must be given to developing closer linkages with the business and industrial community. Cooperative relationships between business and public schools must be forged in which students can receive a portion of their skill training on the job to enable them to go directly into jobs at a high-entry or journeyman level. The gap between learned vocational skills and skills actually used on a job site must be reduced if students are to achieve success in the labor market in a short time span.

The influx of immigrants to this country has increased over the past several years. Students with backgrounds very different from our own are enrolling in our public schools. To adequately serve students who are new to our country, additional program funding will be required to help these students succeed in a culture which is far different from their own. Program investments at an early age for these students will pay rich dividends as they assume their roles as American citizens.

Although much has been said about declining public school enrollments and the possible reduction in funds appropriated to public schools, careful analysis must be given to this myth. Public elementary and secondary schools in the past have not been funded to the extent that they could fulfill all the expectations that society has placed upon them. Specialized programs to meet the unique and emerging needs of many of our public school children-the exceptional, the handicapped, the disadvantaged, the foreign-born to name just a few - will require more of a financial investment than that which will be realized from declining public school enrollments. Declining enrollments in educational programs does not translate into saved dollars since the needs of students in public schools will continue. Lower enrollments, if anything, will mean a higher cost per pupil since the programs must still

be provided regardless of the numbers of students enrolled.

As new thrusts are implemented to improve the public school programs, a constant vigil must be maintained to assure that one portion of the public school curriculum does not become more important, especially at the cost of other programs. We must strive to maintain a balanced curriculum in which children and youth acquire the basic skills in communication, computation, citizenship, healthful living, the sciences, the arts, and vocational endeavors. Improvements must be made on a unified front in all areas of the public school curriculum which result in a quality, comprehensive educational program.

The issues briefly discussed above are a select group from among many that will challenge the public schools in the 80's. These and others will have to be faced in the decade ahead if public schools are to meet the expectations of the students, parents and general public. The American dream that a good education can result in a full and productive life for every citizen continues; the fulfillment of that dream is the challenge for all of us.

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